

DECISION/DIRECTION NOTE

Title: Pedestrian Recall (Transportation Changes in Response to COVID-19) Spring 2021 Update

Date Prepared: November 18, 2020

Report To: Committee of the Whole

Councillor and Role: Councillor Ian Froude, Transportation and Regulatory Services & Sustainability

Ward: N/A

Decision/Direction Required:

Direction is required on whether the pedestrian recall signal timing established at the at outset of the COVID-19 response should be altered or discontinued.

Discussion – Background and Current Status:

Placing a traffic signal on pedestrian recall causes the walk signal to activate on every cycle of the traffic signal. This results in less time available for vehicle traffic and more time allocated to pedestrian traffic regardless of whether a pedestrian is present or not. In the current circumstances it also precludes the need to press the button, which cuts down one potential source of SARS-CoV-2 transmission.

The City currently has 108 full traffic signals operating and another 31 pedestrian signals (overhead flashers, RRFBs or pedestrian signal). The pedestrian recall approach only works at full traffic signals. Pedestrian recall at all 108 intersections was approved by Council in May of 2020. Following implementation a few signals were reverted to normal operations to accommodate a person in the area with a visually impairment.

Small signs advising people that they should no longer use the pushbutton were posted at each push button location as part of this implementation.

Since implementation there have been occasional complaints from drivers that this change has a negative impact on them. Especially in areas, or at times of day, with few pedestrians.

There are four basic methods of operation that could be employed to balance the need to press the pushbutton at a crossing versus the delay experienced by users. These are discussed in the following sections.

1. Business as usual

This strategy attempts to provide the least delay to all users of the intersection regardless of mode. This is the standard practice that has been employed by the City historically. Pedestrian recall is used only where required based on pedestrian volumes

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or infrastructure needs. Note that individual signals are often placed on pedestrian recall temporarily during the winter if the pushbuttons are inaccessible due to snow accumulation.

2. Select locations

One approach would be to identify geographic areas of the City, or select locations, where pedestrian recall is used. (Or, conversely, identify areas to return to business as usual.) For example, one suggestion that was received was that areas “inside” Elizabeth Avenue toward downtown would be placed on pedestrian recall and areas outside this limit would be returned to business as usual operation.

A determination at each intersection based on pedestrian volumes or other quality is the most subjective strategy and therefore most difficult to implement without clear direction from Council. The business as usual case has a technical evaluation for when pedestrian recall is justified. If a different threshold or set of characteristics is to be used to determine what intersection remain on ped recall, then it is necessary to define those criteria. This has the potential to be inconsistent and/or inequitable in how it is rolled out. Given that the City does not have the data needed to make a pedestrian-volume based determination at every intersection it would be a potentially large undertaking to collect this information.

If this strategy were implemented, either based on geography or defined characteristics, it would eliminate the additional delay users experience at the locations selected to return to business as usual at the cost of requiring the pushbutton be pressed.

3. Time of day

Another option would be to apply pedestrian recall during the periods of the day most likely to see pedestrian traffic. For example, from 6AM to 8PM have pedestrian recall on, and overnight turn it off.

To accomplish this, signs would need to be changed to communicate need for button to be pressed during the overnight period. Technical work required to implement is about 2 hours per intersection if no programming issues are identified. For 108 signals, this type of changeover could easily take 1 to 2 months to implement. (Plus, a similar amount of work to roll back change at end of program.)

This would eliminate the additional delay users experience overnight when volumes are lowest and conflicting vehicles/pedestrians are less frequent at the cost of requiring the button be pressed.

4. Full time pedestrian recall

The City is currently operating with pedestrian recall operated full time at all intersections. This has the largest impact to vehicle traffic and user delay but requires no ped buttons to be pushed. (This approach does not apply to pedestrian only signals and exceptions were made for accessibility as noted above)

From a policy perspective any of the options above will work. Each has its own set of benefits and costs and the goals Council would like to achieve can be expressed by the option selected. From a technical perspective, the goal we typically target is to try and minimize user delay which leads to business as usual being the preferred approach. It is noted that switching off pedestrian recall and back to typical signal timing also provides better service for transit priority signal operations.

Based on observations of the amount of traffic that is on our roads these days the increase in delay is not yet causing breakdowns in the traffic signals but as we get closer and closer to pre COVID levels of traffic we will run into this situation. If Council chooses an option other than business as usual, then when the traffic on the roads is closer to “normal” staff will put forward a recommendation to return to this approach.

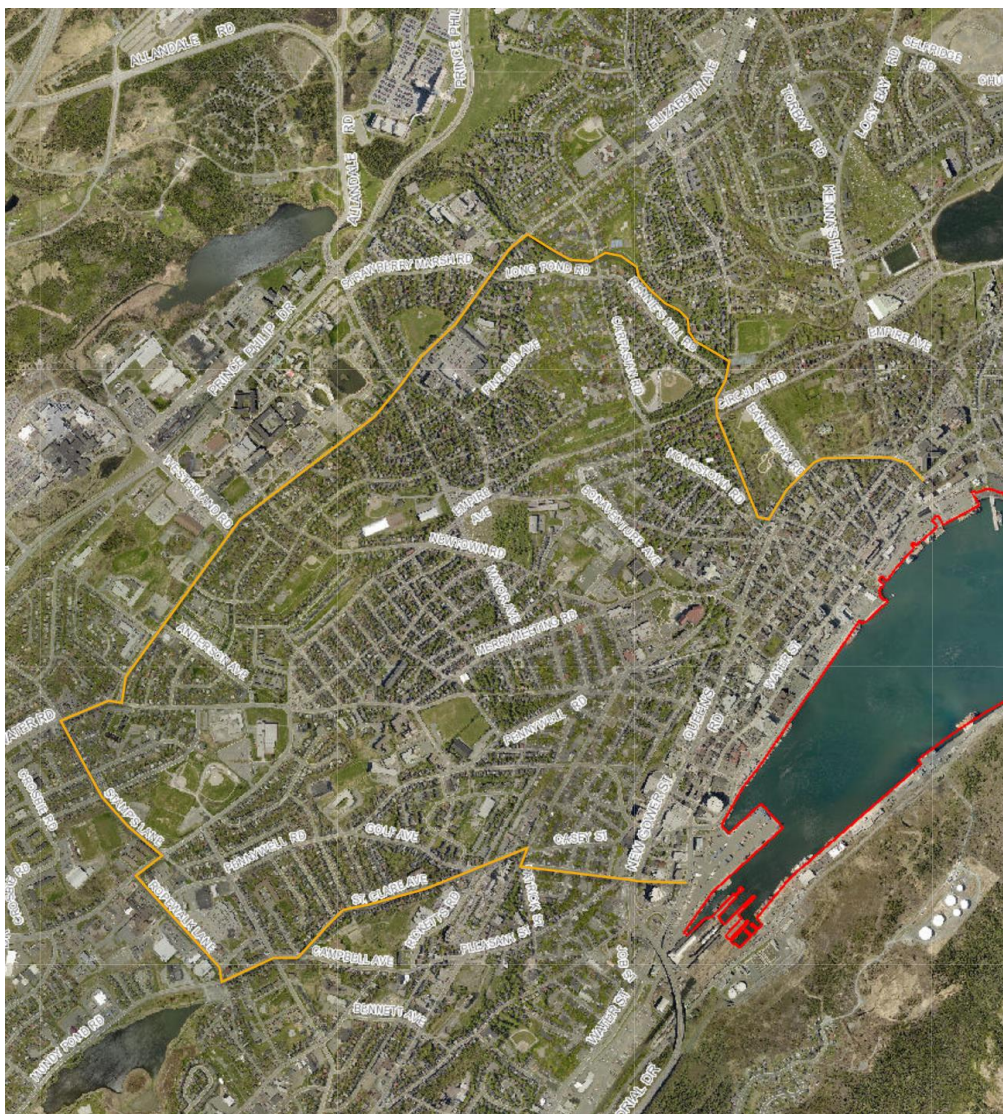
Key Considerations/Implications:

1. Budget/Financial Implications:
Option 3 would require additional signs be purchased which is an expense of a few hundred dollars.
2. Partners or Other Stakeholders:
n/a
3. Alignment with Strategic Directions/Adopted Plans:
n/a
4. Legal or Policy Implications:
n/a
5. Privacy Implications:
n/a
6. Engagement and Communications Considerations:
Changes made to the transportation network will need to be communicated clearly and consistently to the public. Signs are, and would continue to be, used at affected locations to alert pedestrians of any departure from typical operation.
7. Human Resource Implications:
n/a
8. Procurement Implications:
Option 3 requires that signs be purchased.
9. Information Technology Implications:
n/a

10. Other Implications:
n/a

Recommendation:

That Council direct staff to implement Option 2 by returning operation of signals outside the City “core” to business as usual operation. Signals on the boundary or inside the “core” would remain on pedestrian recall. The “core” would be defined by a line starting at Springdale Street and Water Street then following Springdale Street, Lemarchant Road, St. Clare Avenue, Campbell Avenue, Ropewalk Lane, Empire Avenue, Stamps Lane, Freshwater Road, Elizabeth Avenue, Rennie’s River, Portugal Cove Road, Rennie’s Mill Road, Military Road, Cavendish Square, and ending at Cavendish Square and Duckworth Street. An exception to this core area would be at the intersection of Harvey Road/Long’s Hill/LeMarchant Road which would be switched back to the normal timing plan to facilitate transit priority operators.



Prepared by: Anna Snook P.Eng. PTOE, Transportation System Engineer
Approved by: Scott Winsor P.Eng., Director - Engineering

Report Approval Details

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This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Scott Winsor - Apr 23, 2021 - 1:56 PM

Jason Sinyard - Apr 23, 2021 - 4:40 PM